

LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË

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THE task of the novelist and biographer is not dissimilar. The former may have a wider range, "he can create and he destroy," but his creations must be subject to certain rules of art, and his disposal of the creatures of his brain, must not outrage the feelings of society nor the laws of our nature. If he step aside from these given rules — if he holds his pen with too loose a grasp — a host of critics are ready to be unleashed upon him with hideous hue and cry. He may make most unbounded calls upon his imagination, yet must his imagination be well trained. He may advance views, and set forth principles which the preacher may not dare to handle, and which the statesman must touch with tenderest care, but he must do it artistically and in accordance with known and given rules. He may give his characters the broadest liberty of speech, he may put words into their mouths, which he, though a Roman citizen, would not dare to utter, and though there is the risk of opprobrium from this Review, and the bitter taunt of that Gazette; yet there the word stands, and the world will read it, and if it be the truth, it will make its way notwithstanding the Gazette, and the Review, the taunt and the criticism; and in this way the novelist can achieve more than the preacher, the statesman or the citizen. But the power of the novelist is not unlimited, there are rules of art he must not transgress; even as there are conventionalisms to which we must be slaves, little rules of etiquette to which we must transcribe,

or else be voted out of the pale of the "best society:" — while with these conventionalisms one can pass through the rows of rustling silks and shining broadcloth, and mix with the white kids and delicate embroidery, though the sin of the defaulter and seducer may lie beneath the satin vest and the gold adornings.

The range of the biographer is more limited even than that of the novelist. He must not draw largely upon his imagination. He deals with facts. His hand takes hold of a real life, a living spirit. There is a sacredness, a responsibility, in his task, which should be ever present with him while he holds the pen which is to make the record of a life.

The novelist touches principles, ideas, human nature in the abstract, and there is most assuredly a sacredness, a responsibility in this; yet the biographer deals with the human heart itself, and doing this, to be true to his task, he should have ever a holy reverence for the spirit whose record he is giving to the world. He should be careful what tone he gives to his work. The careless dealing with mere blemishes which the best may possess, may unconsciously give a wrong impression of character. The picture must hang in a proper light to be appreciated; throwing too strong a glare upon an imperfect feature, casting the better ones into the shade, gives no correct idea of the portrait; so drawing out into bold relief some trifling idiosyncrasy, throwing into the shade some sterling virtue, though both may be presented, gives a wholly incorrect idea of the subject presented.

The similarity between biography and works of fiction, lies in what Wordsworth tells us. "Biography is like works of fiction, an *art* — the known laws of which are determined by the imperfections of our nature, and the constitution of society. Truth is not here as in the sciences

* The Life of Charlotte Brontë, author of Jane Eyre; Shirley, Villette, &c. By E. C. Gaskell, author of Mary Barton — Ruth.

and in natural philosophy, to be sought without scruple, and promulgated for its own sake, upon the mere chance of its being serviceable; but only for obviously justifying purposes, moral or intellectual. Only to philosophy enlightened by the affections, does it belong justly to estimate the claims of the deceased on the one hand, and of the present and future generations on the other, and to strike a balance between them."

There is then a duty to the dead, and a duty to the living. The dead cannot justify themselves to us, let then the hand that deals with the departed, do it with reverence; and as we would perform our duty to the living, let no light or careless manner of presenting the departed to their view, detract from the brightness of the image they have shrined in their hearts. Truth of course is to be respected above all things; but there are shadows upon the brightest day, yet in our remembrance of that day, is it essential that they detract from its glory? So in life, although we must present the dark side, can it not be done so as to render the brighter only the more apparent? What truly Christian heart thinks any the less of Shelley's beautiful poetic nature, of his gentle, affectionate soul, because of the one cloud of doubt which rested on his otherwise unclouded vision. On the bright disc of Burns, too, the dark spots are only too apparent, but who does not love Burns? and where is the man that might not, should his biographer so choose, stand before the world in a distorted and unjust light?

This is why, as Wordsworth says, "Philosophy enlightened by affection," should perform the task of the biographer; then would the dead have justice done them, then would the living look upon the departed in that true light which will make them better for the study of their virtues, and lenient and just to their faults.

We are assured that "truth is strange—stranger than fiction;" if so, biography, if rightly treated, should be as interesting as romance. And O, how much deeper the lesson it should read us. It is no cold, abstract principle, it is no high wrought tale of deep passion, no stretch of the imagination; it is a life—the life of one who lived and breathed and walked among us, who suffered even as we suffer, and rejoiced as we rejoice. No doubt the humblest life, if wholly and truly known, and written out by the hand that understood it in all its bearings, might be interesting as any fiction. It is oftener the inner life that has the deepest meaning, the strongest lessons; and this too often lies beyond the reach of the biographer. And so we have dull

biographies of even great and good men and women. But sometimes we have a life full of romance and strange events as any novel, and when the hand of philosophy enlightened by affection, undertakes the task of transcribing that life, we have a book richer and purer than any novel. Such a book we have in Mrs. Gaskell's life of Charlotte Bronte.

It is a woman's life written as only a woman could have written it. O ye whose ready tears flow over the pages of novels, who have wept over Jane Eyre, or Shirley, or any tale of deep passion or enduring love, read this simple record of a life in which entered no deep passionate love, such as she herself has so well portrayed, but over which, if there is any drop of human feeling in your heart, any sympathy for suffering and loneliness in your soul, your eyes will be dimmed, and life will have to you more of earnestness and deep meaning than ever before.

We follow Mrs. Gaskell in her life of Charlotte Bronte, with all the interest and excitement with which we followed the varied fortunes of Mary, Barton or Ruth; and the life of the former is as artistic in its arrangement, as the life of her imaginary characters, and should add as much to her fame, and doubtless will to her happiness; inasmuch as it is a duty well performed towards one she loved and valued.

Charlotte Bronte was the daughter of a Yorkshire clergyman residing in Haworth. She was one of six children. Mrs. Gaskell, in the beginning of the first volume, gives us a full description of that part of Yorkshire in which she resided, and also delineates the Yorkshire character, but we think a short extract from one of her own letters will be more interesting to the general reader.

"Haworth Parsonage is an oblong stone house, facing down the hill on which the village stands, and with the front door right opposite to the western door of the church, distant about a hundred yards. Of this space twenty yards or so in depth are occupied by the grassy garden, which is scarcely wider than the house. The graveyard goes round house and garden, on all sides but one. The house consists of four rooms on each floor, and is two stories high. When the Brontes took possession, they made the larger parlour, to the left of the entrance, the family sitting-room, while that on the right was appropriated to Mr. Bronte as a study. Behind this was the kitchen; behind the former, a sort of flagged store-room. Up stairs were four bed-chambers of similar size, with the addition of a

small apartment over the passage, or 'lobby' as we call it in the north. This was to the front, the staircase going up right opposite to the entrance. There is the pleasant old fashion of window seats all through the house; and one can see that the parsonage was built in the days when wood was plentiful, as the massive stair-bannisters, and the wainscots, and the heavy window frames testify.

"This little extra up stairs room was appropriated to the children. Small as it was, it was not called a nursery; indeed, it had not the comfort of a fireplace in it; the servants — two rough affectionate warm-hearted, wasteful sisters, who cannot now speak of the family without tears — called the room the 'children's study.'"

In this obscure village was passed the childhood and most of the life of Charlotte Brontë. It was a singular childhood, this of Charlotte and her sisters; a childhood which explains much of her after life, which lets you into many of the secrets of that mind that could write *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, and *Villette*.

Hardly indeed could we call it a childhood, using the word in its general acceptation. They had no playmates, they had no children's books. "They were grave and silent beyond their years, subdued probably by serious illness in the house, for Mrs. Brontë, a sweet tempered, cheerful person, was an invalid. The six little creatures would walk out hand in hand towards the glorious wild moors which in after days they loved so passionately, the elder ones taking thoughtful care of the little, toddling wee things. In the house you would not have known there was a child, they were such still, noiseless, little creatures. Maria would shut herself up, (but seven) in the children's study, with a newspaper, and be able to tell every one when she came out, debates in parliament, and I don't know what all."

Mr. Brontë was a most eccentric man in many things.

"His strong, passionate, Irish nature was, in general, compressed down with resolute stoicism; but it was there notwithstanding all his philosophic calm and dignity of demeanor. He did not speak when he was annoyed or displeased, but worked off his volcanic wrath by firing pistols out of the back door in rapid succession. Mrs. Brontë lying in bed up-stairs, would hear the quick explosions, and know that something had gone wrong; but her sweet nature thought invariably of the bright side, and she would say, 'Ought I not to be thankful that he never gave me an angry word?' Now and then his anger

took a different form, but still speechless. Once he got the hearth-rug, and stuffing it up the grate, deliberately set it on fire, and remained in the room in spite of the stench, until it had smouldered and shrivelled away into uselessness. Another time he took some chairs, and sawed away at the backs till they were reduced to the condition of stools."

Mrs. Brontë died when Charlotte was five years old, and the lives of the children were quieter and lonelier than ever; an idea of their childish amusements can be gathered from an extract from their father's letter.

"When mere children, as soon as they could read and write, Charlotte and her brothers and sisters used to invent and act little plays of their own, in which the Duke of Wellington, my daughter Charlotte's hero, was sure to come off conqueror; when a dispute would not unfrequently arise amongst them regarding the comparative merits of him, Buonaparte, Hannibal, and Cæsar. When the argument got warm, and rose to its height, as their mother was then dead, I had sometimes to come in as arbitrator, and settle the dispute according to the best of my judgment. Generally in the management of these concerns, I frequently thought that I discovered signs of rising talent, which I had seldom or never before seen in any of their age."

"They took a vivid interest in the public characters, and the local and foreign politics discussed in the newspapers. Long before Maria Brontë died, at the age of eleven, her father used to say he could converse with her on any of the leading topics of the day with as much freedom and pleasure as with any grown-up person."

When Charlotte was about eight or nine years old, she went to Cowan's Bridge school — a school purposely for clergymen's daughters. This school is the Lowood described in *Jane Eyre*, and Helen Burns is an exact transcript of Maria Brontë, Charlotte's oldest sister. The school was in an unhealthy situation, the food was also unhealthy, Maria contracted the seeds of a fatal disease, was taken from school, but died a few days after her arrival home. The second daughter, Elizabeth, also sickened, was taken home and died in the early summer. Mr. Brontë, alarmed for Charlotte and Emily, took them home in the autumn of the same year.

From January 1825 to 1831, we find Charlotte and her sisters at home, taught by their aunt and father, and amusing themselves by writing little plays and stories.

When Charlotte was fifteen, she was sent to

Roe Head to school. It was a pleasant life at Roe Head compared to Cowan Bridge. Her first appearance at that school is thus described.

"I first saw her coming out of a covered cart, in very old-fashioned clothes, and looking very cold and miserable. She was coming to school at Miss Wooler's. When she appeared in the school-room, her dress was changed, but just as old. She looked a little old woman, so short-sighted that she always appeared to be seeking something, and moving her head from side to side to catch a sight of it. She was very shy and nervous, and spoke with a strong Irish accent. When a book was given her, she dropped her head over it till her nose nearly touched it, and when she was told to hold her head up, up went the book after it, still close to her nose, so that it was not possible to help laughing."

At this place she found the two friends to whom most of her letters are directed, and whose friendship cheered her through all her life. She staid at Roe Head a year, and then went home to live at the Parsonage with her two sisters Emily and Anne, her father, and her brother Branwell, a handsome boy with "tawny hair."

In July 1835, Miss Bronte went as teacher to Roe Head, Emily accompanying her as pupil; "but she was literally ill from home-sickness, and obliged to return." This sister Emily was a very peculiar person, even in this family where all was peculiar. She could not live away from the moors, so whichever was obliged to leave home, it was decided that Emily must remain.

"When at home she took the principal part of the cooking upon herself, and did all the household ironing; and after Tabby grew old and infirm, it was Emily who made all the bread for the family; and any one passing by the kitchen-door, might have seen her studying German out of an open book propped up before her, as she kneaded the dough; but no study, however interesting, interfered with the goodness of the bread, which was always light and excellent. Books were, indeed, a very common sight in that kitchen; the girls were taught by their father theoretically, and by their aunt practically, that to take an active part in all household work was, in their position, woman's simple duty; but in their careful employment of time, they found many an odd five minutes for reading while watching the cakes, and managed the union of two kinds of employment better than King Alfred."

Charlotte's life at Roe Head, was very happy; but her health failed, there was a loss of healthy

balance of mind and body. The sedentary and monotonous life preyed upon her spirits. The sisters met at home during the Christmas holidays. What was to be done? Teaching was wearing their health, yet something must be done. They had written stories for their little magazines, poetry too they had written, and not without success; but they might be mistaken in their judgment, — so Charlotte wrote to Southey, enclosing some of her writing, and asking his opinion. They waited long for an answer, and in the mean time Charlotte resumed her teaching. The letter came from Southey at last, and while "he would not disparage the gift which she possesses, nor discourage her from using it, he only wishes her so to think of it, and so to use it, as to render it conducive to a permanent good."

She says the letter did her good, and made her put aside for a time all idea of literary enterprise. Her health and spirits did not improve. Her feelings were gloomy and morbid, as her letters at this time show, but she kept on in her work till she grew "so sick and trembling that at any sudden noise she could hardly repress her screams;" then she was obliged to consult a physician, to give up her school, to go home to the moors, and to those she loved.

She grew stronger in her home. Anne, the younger sister, obtained a situation as governess, and shortly after Charlotte entered upon the same life. And now begun that experience which we have shadowed forth in *Jane Eyre*. It was a life not always pleasant, but it was followed up with occasional interruptions by ill health and other things, till the year 1842. Then the two sisters, Charlotte and Emily, went to Brussels to attend school for a year. It had been a favorite plan with the sisters to establish a school for young ladies, but they considered themselves as yet not wholly competent for the business, so they determined to devote a year to study. She thus says:

"I was twenty-six years old a week or two since; and at this ripe time of life I am a school-girl, and, on the whole, very happy in that capacity. It felt very strange at first to submit to authority instead of exercising it — to obey orders instead of giving them; but I like that state of things. I returned to it with the same avidity that a cow, that has long been kept on dry hay, returns to fresh grass. Don't laugh at my simile. It is natural to me to submit, and very unnatural to command."

Before the end of the year her aunt dies, the

sisters are called home, and the whole family are together at Christmas. After this, Charlotte returns again to Brussels, but alone. It was lonely for her, but she kept on in her purpose. At the end of the year she felt that her presence was required at home, for her father's eyesight had begun to fail — another sorrow faintly perceived in the distance.

Their cherished project of a school must be relinquished; for a sorrow worse than death threatened them, a sorrow caused by the sin and transgression of one they loved. Their only brother Branwell, was going fast on the road to ruin, "the sin in which he was an accomplice, was dragging him down to confirmed habits of intemperance." A short extract will tell the sad story.

"Branwell, I have mentioned, had obtained a situation as a private tutor. Full of available talent, a brilliant talker, a good writer, apt at drawing, ready of appreciation, and with a not unhandsome person, he took the fancy of a married woman, nearly twenty years older than himself. It is no excuse for him to say that she began the first advances, and 'made love' to him. She was so bold and hardened, that she did it in the very presence of her children, fast approaching to maturity; and they would threaten her that if she did not grant them such and such indulgences, they would tell their bed-ridden father 'how she went on with Mr. Brontë.' He was so beguiled by this mature and wicked woman, that he went home for his holidays reluctantly, stayed there as short a time as possible, perplexing and distressing them all by his extraordinary conduct — at one time in the highest spirits, at another, in the deepest depression — accusing himself of blackest guilt and treachery, without specifying what they were; and altogether evincing an irritability of disposition bordering on insanity.

"Charlotte and her sister suffered acutely from his mysterious behavior. He expressed himself more than satisfied with his situation; he was remaining in it for a longer time than he had ever done in any kind of employment before; so they could not conjecture that any thing there made him so wilful and restless, and full of both levity and misery. But a sense of something wrong connected with him, sickened and oppressed them. They began to lose all hope in his future career. He was no longer the family pride; an indistinct dread was creeping over their minds that he might turn out their deep disgrace. But, I believe, they shrank from any attempt to define

their fears, and spoke of him to each other as little as possible. They could not help but think, and mourn, and wonder."

It was a very dark time for Charlotte.

"Her honest plan for earning her own livelihood had fallen away, crumbled to ashes; after all her preparations, not a pupil had offered herself; and, instead of being sorry that this wish of many years could not be realized, she had reason to be glad. Her poor father, nearly sightless, depended upon her cares in his blind helplessness; but this was a sacred pious charge, the duties of which she was blessed in fulfilling. The black gloom hung over what had once been the brightest hope of the family — over Branwell, and the mystery in which his wayward conduct was enveloped. Somehow and sometime, he would have to turn to his home as a hiding place for shame; such was the sad foreboding of his sisters."

A new interest was added to this sad autumn, the sisters under the names of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, published a volume of poems; they however attracted not much attention at the time.

In the meanwhile Mr. Brontë's blindness increased, and he goes to Manchester to undergo an operation by the hands of an eminent oculist; Charlotte accompanies him, and under the dispiriting circumstances of this visit, "in this time of care and depressing inquietudes, — in those grey, weary, uniform streets, where all faces, save that of her kind doctor, were strange and untouched with sunlight to her — there and then did the brave genius begin 'Jane Eyre.'"

She had before this sent a manuscript to the publishers, which was rejected and which came to her just at this time.

"Think of her home, and the black shadow of remorse lying over one in it, till his very brain was mazed, and his gifts and his life were lost; — think of her father's sight hanging on a thread; — of her sister's delicate health, and dependance on her care; — and then admire, as it deserves to be admired, the steady courage which could work away at 'Jane Eyre,' all the time 'that the one-volume tale was plodding its weary round in London.'"

The operation upon her father's eyes was successful, but he was still obliged to be very careful. "The quiet, sad year stole on. The sisters were contemplating near at hand, and for a long time, the terrible effects of talents misused and faculties abused in the person of that brother, once their fond darling and dearest pride. They

had to cheer the poor old father into whose heart all trials sunk the deeper because of the silent stoicism of his endurance."

"They had to watch over his health, of which, whatever was its state, he seldom complained. They had to save, as much as they could, the precious remnants of his sight. They had to order the frugal household with increased care, so as to supply wants and expenditure utterly foreign to their self-denying natures."

And yet in the midst of this life Jane Eyre was making progress — was finished. It went to the publishers in August — it was issued to the public in October. In that quiet Yorkshire home, busied in common household cares — reading to her almost blind father — sorrowing over her sinful brother — was the woman whose words were setting all England in a ferment. Yet all England was ignorant of the person who so moved them.

"In every town people sought out the list of their friends and acquaintances, and turned away in disappointment. No one they knew had genius enough to be the author. Every little incident mentioned in the book was turned this way and that, to answer, if possible, the much-vexed question of sex. All in vain. People were content to relax their exertions to satisfy their curiosity, and simply to sit down and greatly admire."

Even the father did not know of the book till it was put into his hands by his daughter; and the dearest friend of her life was not told the secret; it was hidden in that stone parsonage at Haworth.

Thus was Jane Eyre ushered into the world, and thus did Charlotte Brontë's existence become divided into two parallel currents; her life as Currer Bell, the author — her life as Charlotte Brontë, the woman. Her sisters were now publishing "*Wuthering Heights*" and "*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*," and a report had been circulated that the author of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, was one and the same person. The news reached Haworth, and Charlotte and Anne started immediately for London, personally to prove to their publisher their respective individuality. There is something peculiarly interesting in this first trip to London. After early tea they set out to walk to Keighley, there to take the train. A thunderstorm overtook them, but in their excitement they scarcely heeded it; they started in the night train for London, and arrived at eight o'clock in the morning, at the Chapter Coffee House, Paternoster Row.

They refreshed themselves by washing and taking some breakfast; and then set out to walk through the maze of London, to the publisher. When they presented themselves before him, giving him his own letter which he had sent to Currer Bell, he could not believe that "the two young ladies dressed in black, of slight figures and diminutive stature, looking pleased yet agitated, could be the embodied Currer and Acton Bell, whom curiosity had been hunting up so eagerly."

They were lionized a little about London, and taken to the opera, "where fine ladies and gentlemen stared at them," visited the National Gallery and other places, and Charlotte says, "a more jaded wretch than I looked when I got home, you cannot conceive."

But the cloud that had been hanging over the household for some time, burst at length. In October 1848, she writes:

"The past three weeks have been a dark interval in our humble home. Branwell's constitution had been failing fast all the summer: but still, neither the doctors nor himself thought him so near his end as he was. He was entirely confined to his bed but for one single day, and was in the village two days before his death. He died, after twenty minutes' struggle, on Sunday morning, September 24th. He was perfectly conscious till the last agony came on. His mind had undergone the peculiar change which frequently precedes death, two days previously; the calm of better feelings filled it; a return of natural affection marked his last moments. He is in God's hands now; and the All-Powerful is likewise the All-Merciful. A deep conviction that he rests at last — rests well, after his brief, erring, suffering, feverish life — fills and quiets my mind now."

The first blow had fallen, the sinful, the erring, was gone from earth, and a feeling of relief — yes, it must have been actual relief, stole over the quiet household.

But another change approached of which she thus speaks:

"Affliction came in that shape which to anticipate is dread; to look back on grief. In the very heat and burden of the day, the laborers failed over their work. My sister Emily first declined. . . . Never in all her life had she lingered over any task that lay before her, and she did not linger now. She sank rapidly. She made haste to leave us. . . . Day by day, when I saw with what a front she met suffering, I looked on her with an anguish of wonder and love. I have seen nothing like it; but, indeed,

have never seen her parallel in any thing. Stronger than a man, simpler than a child, her nature stood alone. The awful point was that while full of ruth for others, on herself she had no pity; the spirit was inexorable to the flesh; from the trembling hands, the unnerved limbs, the fading eyes, the same service was exacted as they had rendered in health. To stand by and witness this, and not dare to remonstrate, was a pain no words can render."

There is something terrible in the sickness and death of this strange being.

"She made no complaint; she would not endure questioning; she rejected sympathy and help. Many a time did Charlotte and Anne drop their sewing, or cease from their writing, to listen with wrung hearts to the failing step, the labored breathing, the frequent pauses, with which their sister climbed the short staircase; yet they dared not notice what they observed, with pangs of suffering even deeper than hers. They dared not notice it in words, far less by the caressing assistance of a helping arm or hand. They sat — still and silent."

She would not consult a physician, she would not even touch the medicine procured for her, the offices of love so sweet to render could not be rendered to her, for she owned no sickness; they could not talk to her of declining health, they could only look at her, see her dying before their eyes, and offer no word of sympathy or hope.

"But Emily was growing rapidly worse. I remember Miss Bronte's shiver at recalling the pang she felt when, after having searched in the little hollows and sheltered crevices of the moors for a lingering spray of heather — just one spray, however withered — to take in to Emily, she saw that the flower was not recognized by the dim and indifferent eyes. Yet, to the last, Emily adhered tenaciously to her habits of independence. She would suffer no one to assist her. Any effort to do so roused the old stern spirit. One Tuesday morning, in December, she arose and dressed herself as usual, making many a pause, but doing every thing for herself, and even endeavoring to take up her employment of sewing; the servants looked on, and knew what the catching, rattling breath, and the glazing of the eye too surely foretold; but she kept at her work; and Charlotte and Anne, though full of unspeakable dread, had still the faintest spark of hope. On that morning Charlotte wrote thus, — probably in the very presence of her dying sister: —

'Tuesday.

'I should have written to you before, if I had

had one word of hope to say; but I have not. She grows daily weaker. The physician's opinion was expressed too obscurely to be of use. He sent some medicine, which she would not take. Moments so dark as these I have never known. I pray for God's support to us all. Hitherto he has granted it.'

"The morning drew on to noon. Emily was worse; she could only whisper in gasps. Now, when it was too late, she said to Charlotte, 'If you will send for a doctor, I will see him now.' About two o'clock she died."

The gentle Anne was drooping when Emily died. How sad was Charlotte's life, they only know, who have watched one after another their loved ones depart. "The days pass on in a slow, dark march, the nights are the test; the sudden wakings from restless sleep, the revived knowledge that one lies in her grave, and another not at my side, but in a separate and sick bed."

But there was not the same trial with Anne as with Emily; she was a gentle sufferer, her sister could talk to her, and she did not reject her sympathy and loving offices. As a last resort, she was taken to the sea-side, but it was of no avail. She left her home May 24th, and died May 28th. Her death was quiet and gentle as her life had been.

"Her faith never failed, and her eye never dimmed till about two o'clock, when she calmly and without a sigh passed from the temporal to the eternal. So still, and so hallowed were her last hours and moments. There was no thought of assistance or of dread. The doctor came and went two or three times. The hostess knew that death was near, yet so little was the house disturbed by the presence of the dying, and the sorrow of those so nearly bereaved, that dinner was announced as ready, through the half opened door, as the living sister was closing the eyes of the dead one."

Sad must have been the bereaved sister's return to that lonely home, and she thus describes it.

"I got here a little before eight o'clock. All was clean and bright waiting for me. Papa and the servants were well; and all received me with an affection which should have consoled. The dogs seemed in strange ecstasy. I am certain they regarded me as the harbinger of others. The dumb creatures thought as I was returned, those who had been so long absent were not far behind.

"I left papa soon, and went into the dining-room; I shut the door — I tried to be glad that

I was come home. I have always been glad before — except once — even then I was cheered. But this time joy was not to be the sensation. I felt that the house was all silent — the rooms were all empty. I remembered where the three were laid — in what narrow, dark dwellings — never more to re-appear on earth. So the sense of desolation and bitterness took possession of me. The agony that *was to be undergone*, and *was not to be avoided*, came on. I underwent it, and passed a dreary evening and night, and a mournful morrow; to-day I am better."

How changed now was Haworth Parsonage. It had been the custom among the sisters, when girls, to sew till nine o'clock, and then the duties of the day were accounted done. They put away their work and began to pace the room backwards and forwards, up and down; — but in that room one only remained — one form alone paced up and down by the flickering firelight — the dull ticking of the clock fell only on one sad heart, and strong in endeavor must that heart have been, that could have said even then, "Crushed I am not yet, nor robbed of elasticity nor of hope, nor quite of endeavor." Certainly not of endeavor, for in the midst of all this Shirley was being written.

The rest of the book is a record of her literary labors varied by occasional visits to her friends and to London, where the excitement was too much for her feeble nerves and shattered health. She was finally obliged to stipulate for quiet before she would consent to visit the town. She found many acquaintances among the literary circles of London, and we have accounts of her friendship with Miss Martineau, Mrs. Gaskell, Thackeray and many others of the literati.

And now after following this life thus far, how looks to us that old stone parsonage at Haworth, which shrined so much of genius within its walls? The wide wild moors stretch far off in the distance around it, on all sides but one the tombstones rise up, yet it is the home of Charlotte Bronte, and so we will love it. Here good Mrs. Bronte died, leaving her six children motherless — here Maria and Elizabeth were brought home to die — here guilty, erring, yet gifted Branwell, ended his sinful career — here Emily, stern and unyielding to the last, was conquered by the victor — and from this gate the gentle Anne was carried out with the seal of death upon her! Here now sits the almost blind father — here paces up and down, backward and forward, in the room they occupied, the lonely sister. Is it not a gloomy place? Does not a shadow hang upon

its walls, which all the fame of Jane Eyre can hardly brighten? But a glow as of a summer sunset, now lightens up its old walls, as if to make our memory of it pleasant. The day is near its closing, clouds dark and threatening have hung about it, and though bright gleams have crossed it, still it has been a day of gloom and shade; but bright and clear is its closing — it sets in glory. A transient gleam of happiness — a full fruition of enjoyment for one brief space lighting up all the past, and throwing a glory upon the future — that future which will never be for her, was vouchsafed to Charlotte Bronte.

There was a wedding in the church at Haworth, nine months of married life were passed at the parsonage.

"Henceforward the sacred doors of home are closed upon her married life. We, her loving friends, standing outside, caught occasional glimpses of brightness, and pleasant, peaceful murmurs of sound, telling of the gladness within; and we looked at each other, and gently said, 'After a hard and long struggle — after many cares and many bitter sorrows — she is tasting happiness now!' We thought of the slight astringencies of her character, and how they would turn to full ripe sweetness in that calm sunshine of domestic peace. We remembered her trials, and were glad in the idea that God had seen fit to wipe away the tears from her eyes. Those who saw her, saw an outward change in her look, telling of inward things. And we thought, and we hoped, and we prophesied, in our great love and reverence."

She was lonely no more. "My life is different from what it used to be, May God make me thankful for it."

In her last illness she writes: "No kinder, better husband than mine, it seems to me, can be in the world." And these were the last words she wrote, and of these the feeble hands could hardly form the letters. It was hard to die just as life was so bright; looking up into her husband's woe worn face, she caught the sound of murmured words of prayer that God would spare her.

"'Oh!' she whispered forth, 'I am not going to die, am I? He will not separate us, we have been so happy.'"

"Early on Saturday morning, March 31st, the solemn tolling of Haworth church-bell spoke forth the fact of her death to the villagers who had known her from a child, and whose hearts shivered within them as they thought of the two sitting desolate and alone in the old grey house."

No better tribute can be offered to Charlotte Brontë than is given by Mr. Gaskell.

"Few beyond that circle of hills knew that she, whom the nations praised far off, lay dead that Easter morning. Of kith and kin she had more in the grave to which she was soon to be borne, than among the living. The two mourners, stunned with their great grief, desired not the sympathy of strangers. One member out of most of the families in the parish, was bidden to the funeral; and it became an act of self-denial in many a poor household, to give up to another the privilege of paying their last homage to her; and those who were excluded from the formal train of mourners thronged the church-yard and church, to see carried forth, and laid beside her own people, her whom, not many months ago, they had looked at as a pale white bride, entering on a new life with trembling, happy hope.

"Among those humble friends who passionately grieved over the dead, was a village girl who had been seduced some little time before, but who had found a holy sister in Charlotte. She had sheltered her with her help, her counsel, her strengthening words; had ministered to her needs in her time of trial. Bitter, bitter was the grief of this poor young woman, when she heard that her friend was sick unto death, and deep is her mourning until this day. A blind girl, living some four miles from Haworth, loved Mrs. Nicholls so dearly, that, with many cries and entreaties, she implored those about her to lead her along the roads, and over the moor-paths, that she might hear the last solemn words, 'Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ.' "

And this is the life of a woman of genius — it is a life of toil, of labor, of stern trial; illuminated by flashes of sunlight, gladdened by a beautiful close, and passing away just as it was the brightest. How many, sitting in happy homes, blessed with love of husband and children, of whom the world has never heard, would change their life for hers? Did her peculiar childhood, did her peculiar education, make her what she was? — or were the seeds of that genius so implanted in her mind, that they would have flourished amid any circumstances? We are of the opinion that Jane Eyre, and Shirley, and Villette, would never have been given to the world, had not that peculiar childhood and education, that stern experience, that lonely life among the

moors, made of Charlotte Brontë — the woman, — Currer Bell — the author.

Had we time, we would like to consider for a while the works of "Currer Bell," even as we have been considering the life of "Charlotte Brontë." A word about this name of "Currer Bell:" she wished her sex not known, she had no desire to be measured by what was becoming in her sex, nor "what was elegant and charming femininity," she asked nothing of the world's gallantry, all she wished was justice, and under a man's name she thought herself more sure of obtaining it.

But genius is very apt to find its place, be it in man or woman; and "Charlotte Brontë," we like the name better than that of "Currer Bell," may well stand unabashed beside Dickens or Thackeray.

"Jane Eyre" need not blush even beside the immaculate "Agnes," and the spirit of "Shirley" we consider in a far better vein than that of "Becky Sharpe."